

# The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise

Translated from the Icelandic  
with Introduction, Notes and Appendices

by

Christopher Tolkien

*Lecturer in Old English*

*New College, Oxford*

Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd

London Edinburgh Paris Melbourne Johannesburg  
Toronto and New York

## HERE BEGINS THE SAGA OF KING HEIDREK THE WISE

### I

Sigrlami was the name of a king who ruled over Gardaríki<sup>1</sup>; his daughter was Eyfura,<sup>2</sup> most beautiful of all women. This king had obtained from dwarfs<sup>3</sup> the sword called Tyríng,<sup>4</sup> the keenest of all blades; every time it was drawn a light shone from it like a ray of the sun. It could never be held unsheathed without being the death of a man, and it had always to be sheathed with blood still warm upon it. There was no living thing, neither man nor beast, that could live to see another day if it were wounded by Tyríng, whether the wound were big or little; never had it failed in a stroke or been stayed before it plunged into the earth, and the man who bore it in battle would always be victorious, if blows were struck with it.<sup>5</sup> This sword is renowned in all the ancient tales.

---

<sup>4</sup> On the origin of the name Tyríng see Introduction, p. xxiv. As the name of a sword it occurs in a verse of the eleventh-century poet Arnór Thórdarson (Jarlaskáld), *Skj.* A I 349.

<sup>5</sup> With this description of Tyríng's qualities cf. *SnE.* 154: 'Now I have drawn Dáinsleif which the dwarfs made, which must cause a man's death every time it is bared, and which never fails in its stroke; and the wound never heals, if one is scratched with it.'

## 2

There was a man named Arngrím,<sup>1</sup> who was a great viking. He journeyed east to Gardaríki, and dwelt a while with Sigrlami the king; he became the captain of his host, for the protection of both land and liegemen, since the king was now old.

Arngrím became then so great a lord that the king gave him his daughter in marriage, and established him as the greatest man in his realm; the sword Tyrting he gave him also. Afterwards the king took to his rest, and nothing more is told of him.

Arngrím went north, together with his wife Eyfura, to the land of his inheritance, and settled in the island called Bólm.<sup>2</sup> They had twelve sons; the eldest and most renowned was named Angantýr, the second Hjörvard, the third Hervard, the fourth Hrani, and then the two Haddings; no more are named.<sup>3</sup> They were all berserks,<sup>4</sup> champions so great and strong that on their forays they were never more than twelve, and they never went into battle without gaining the victory; for this they were famed in every land, and there was no king who would not grant them what they demanded.

Now it happened one Yule-eve that men were to make solemn vows<sup>5</sup> at the Bragarfull,<sup>6</sup> as the custom is; and the sons of Arngrím made their vows. Hjörvard made the vow<sup>7</sup> that he would marry the daughter of Ingjald, king of the Swedes,<sup>8</sup> a woman famed through every land for her beauty and accomplishment, or no woman else.

That same spring the twelve brothers set out, and coming to Uppsala they went before the king's table, where his daughter sat beside him. Then Hjörvard declared before the king his mission and his vow, while all within the hall listened; and he told the king to say quickly

this particular one) becomes a constantly recurring theme in the late sagas, and is frequently associated with the great mid-winter feast, Yule.

<sup>6</sup> The first element of *bragar-* or *braga-full* is related to such words as O. E. *brego* 'lord.' In view of the description in *Ynglinga Saga* ch. 36, the 'lord's cup' has been taken to be a toast drunk at inheritance-feasts in memory of the dead king; by others *braga(r)-full* has been connected with the god Thór, who is called *Ásabragr*; cf. especially *Hákonar Saga Góða* ch. 14.

<sup>7</sup> In *H* it is Angantýr who makes the vow; see Introduction p. xiii.

<sup>8</sup> The Swedish king is called Yngvi in *HU*. His daughter's name was Ingibjörg (see verse 10).

what the issue of his errand there should be. The king pondered these words, remembering how powerful the brothers were, descendants of a glorious line; but at that moment the man called Hjalmar the Great-hearted stepped forward over the king's table. 'Lord king!' he said, 'call to mind now what great honour I have brought you since I came to this land, and how many battles I have fought to win kingdoms under your authority; all my service I have bestowed on you. I ask you now to grant my request, for the increase of my honour, and give me your daughter, on whom my heart has always been set; and it is more fitting that you should grant this request to me rather than to these berserks, who have done nothing but evil, both in your realm and in those of many other kings.'

Now the king pondered more deeply still, and very difficult he thought it, that there should be such contention over his daughter between these two chieftains. At last he spoke thus. He said they were both such great men and so nobly born that he would not refuse to be allied with either, and he told his daughter to choose whom she would have. She answered that that was fair, and that if her father would give her in marriage she would rather have a man that she knew good of than one of whom she knew tales only, and those all evil, as of the sons of Arngrím. Then Hjörvard challenged Hjalmar to a duel<sup>1</sup> south on Sámsey,<sup>2</sup> and cursed him as an outcast, to be loathed and despised by every man, if he married the lady before the issue of this single combat; and Hjalmar said that nothing would keep him back.

Now the sons of Arngrím departed home and told their father of the result of their quest; and Arngrím said that never before had he feared for them on their travels. After that the brothers journeyed to the jarl Bjarmar,<sup>3</sup> and he made a great feast for them. Now Angantýr desired to marry Sváfa, the jarl's daughter; and so their wedding-feast was held.

Then Angantýr told the jarl of a dream that he had had: he said that he had dreamed that the brothers were on Sámsey, and that there they came upon many birds, and slew them all. Then they took another path upon the island, and two eagles flew against them; Angantýr dreamed that he attacked one of them, and they had a bitter struggle, but they both sank down before all was over. The second eagle fought with his eleven brothers, and it seemed to him that the eagle had the upper hand. The jarl said that this dream needed no interpreting, and that the downfall of mighty men had been revealed to him.

## 3

When the brothers came home they made themselves ready for the encounter; and their father accompanied them to the ship, and gave Angantýr the sword Tyrting, saying, 'I think that good weapons will be needed now.' Then he said farewell, and after that they parted.

When the brothers came to Sámsey they saw that two ships were lying in the anchorage called Munarvág, ships of the kind called 'ashes'.<sup>1</sup> They thought that these would be the ships of Hjálmar and Odd the Far-traveller, who was called Arrow-Odd. Then the sons of Arngrím drew their swords and gnawed the rims of their shields, and the berserk-frenzy came upon them; they went out onto the two ships, six on each. But the men on board were so stout-hearted, that all seized their weapons, and none left his place or uttered any word of fear. The berserks went up one side and down the other, and slew them all; and then they went howling up on shore.

Hjálmar and Odd had gone up onto the island to see if the berserks had arrived; and as they were returning from the forest to their ships the berserks left the vessels with their weapons bloody and their swords drawn; but the berserk-fury had now left them, and berserks become weaker then than at other times, as after certain kinds of sickness. Then Odd spoke<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) Fear beset me  
       for a single moment,  
       as they left the longships  
       loudly bellowing,  
       crying terribly  
       climbed the island,  
       twelve together,  
       inglorious men.

Then Hjálmar said to Odd, 'Do you see that all our men are slain?

---

<sup>2</sup> A fuller form of the verse dialogue that follows is found in *Qrvar-Odds Saga*, and is given in Appendix A (II).

I think it is most likely that we shall all be Ódin's guests in Valhöll tonight.'<sup>1</sup> And it is said that these were the only words of fear that Hjálmar ever uttered.

'My advice,' Odd answered, 'would be that we should escape into the forest, for the two of us will not be able to contend with these twelve, who have slain twelve of the stoutest men in the kingdom of the Swedes.'

But Hjálmar said, 'Let us never flee away from our enemies, but rather endure their weapons; I shall go out to fight with the berserks.'

'I have no mind to spend tonight with Ódin,' Odd answered; 'all these berserks shall be dead men before nightfall, but we two shall live.'

These words of theirs are vouched for by these verses which they uttered:

- (2) Strong are the warriors  
the warships leaving,  
twelve together,  
inglorious men;  
we shall be this evening  
under Ódin's roof,  
two sworn-brothers,  
but the twelve shall live.

Odd spoke:

- (3) To that speech of yours  
I say in answer:  
They shall be this evening  
under Ódin's roof,  
the twelve berserks;  
we two shall live!

Now Hjálmar and his companion saw that Angantýr had Tyrfing in his hand, for a light shone from it like a ray of the sun.

'Will you take on Angantýr alone,' said Hjálmar, 'or his eleven brothers?'

'I will fight with Angantýr,' said Odd; 'he will give great blows with Tyrfing, and I put more trust in my shirt for protection than in your corslet.'

'Where have you ever taken precedence over me in battle?' said Hjálmar. 'You wish to fight with Angantýr because you think it the

sterner test. But I am the principal in this combat; and it was not this that I promised the princess in Sweden—to let you or anyone else enter this duel on my behalf. It is I who shall fight with Angantýr'—and he drew his sword and went forward to meet him. Each showed the other the way to Valhöll<sup>1</sup>; and now Hjalmar and Angantýr turned on each other, and wasted little time between the great strokes they gave.

Odd called out to the berserks, saying:

- (4) Singly shall they fight,  
the strong heroes,  
unless they be soft,  
or their spirit fail them!

Then Hjörvard stepped forward, and had with Odd a stern exchange; but Odd's silken shirt<sup>2</sup> was so sure a protection that no weapon could bite on it, and he had a sword so good that it cut into armour like cloth, and he gave Hjörvard few blows before he fell dead. Then Hervard stepped forward, and things went the same way with him; then Hrani; and so one after another, and Odd attacked them so fiercely that he felled all the eleven brothers. But of the grim game between Hjalmar and his foe there is this to tell, that Hjalmar got sixteen wounds, but Angantýr fell dead.

Odd went up to Hjalmar, and said<sup>3</sup>:

- (5) Hjalmar, what ails you?  
Your hue is altered;  
many the wounds are  
that waste your strength;  
cleft is your helmet  
and the coat on your side:  
I say you have seen  
the sum of your days.

---

<sup>2</sup> Arrow-Odd got his 'silken shirt' from a fairy woman in Ireland; the story is told in *Orvar-Odds Saga* chs. 22, 24, and the *U*-version also mentions that it came from Ireland. This idea of a *skyrt*a against which all weapons are powerless is extremely common in the late sagas; cf. Åke Lagerholm, *Drei Lygisögur* (*Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek* 17, 1927, 69).

<sup>3</sup> *Orvar-Odds Saga* has four additional verses of this poem, which are given in Appendix A (III).

Hjálmar spoke:

- (6) Wounds have I sixteen,  
slit is my corslet,  
sight is darkened,  
I see not my way;  
to my heart pierced me,  
poison-hardened,<sup>1</sup>  
Angantýr's blade —  
bitter the point was.

More he said:

- (7) Farms I owned there  
five together,  
my lot in that land  
yet loved I never;  
now<sup>2</sup> must I lie here  
of life bereft,  
here on Sámsey  
by the sword wounded.
- (8) Mead they are drinking,  
adorned with gems,  
the throng of his folk  
in my father's hall<sup>3</sup>;  
ale overmasters  
many a warrior,  
but the marks of the blade  
torment me here.
- (9) I went away  
from that white maiden<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> cf. verse 41/6. This is a widespread conception, not only in Norse (cf. *Beowulf* 1459, of the sword Hrunting); Falk, *Altnord. Waffen.* 3 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Lines 5–7 of verse 7, with very slight variation from the form they have in *RU*, are found also in *Hildibrand's Death-Song* (*Edd. Min.* 54).

<sup>3</sup> On the remarkable divergence between the two saga-texts here (that of *Orvar-Odds Saga* meaning: 'Now the crowd of his court / with the king are drinking / their ale gladly / at Uppsala') see Appendix A (III).

<sup>4</sup> The Valkyrie name *Gunnr* ('battle') is common in kennings for women, and thus either *hlaðs-gunnr* (*hlað* 'lace, embroidery') or *beð-gunnr* (*beðr* 'bed') would form a complete kenning. Perhaps *hlaðs beðr* ('bed of embroidery') should be taken to mean 'cloak,' and *hlaðs beð-gunnr* 'lady of the cloak.'



on the outer shore  
 of Agnafit<sup>1</sup>;  
 her fore-telling  
 true will prove now:  
 I shall return not  
 ever again.

- (10) The red-gold ring —  
 from my wrist take it,  
 to Ingibjörg  
 I ask you, bear it;  
 it will give her  
 grief long-lasting  
 when I come not ever  
 to Uppsala.

- (11)<sup>2</sup> I went from delight  
 of women's singing,  
 for joy eager  
 east with Sóti,<sup>3</sup>  
 sped my journey  
 to join the host,  
 left for the last time  
 loyal companions.

- (12) From the high treetop  
 hurries the raven,  
 from the east flying,  
 the eagle his escort;  
 food for the eagle  
 I find for the last time:  
 he shall make his meal  
 on my blood now.

---

<sup>1</sup> Agnafit: the low-lying coastal stretch along the outflow of Lake Mälaren, where present-day Stockholm lies.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 11 should probably follow verse 9, as it does in *U*; see Appendix A (III).

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that Sóti was Hjálmar's original companion; see Introduction p. xiii.

After that Hjálmar died. Back in Sweden Odd told these tidings; but the king's daughter could not live on after Hjálmar, and she took her own life.<sup>1</sup> Angantýr and his brothers were laid in a mound on Sámsey with all their weapons.

Bjarmar's daughter was with child; and it was a girl of great beauty. She was sprinkled with water,<sup>2</sup> and given a name, and called Hervör. She was brought up in the house of the jarl, and she was as strong as a man; as soon as she could do anything for herself she trained herself more with bow and shield and sword than with needle-work and embroidery. She did more often harm than good, and when it was forbidden her she ran away to the woods and killed men for her gain. When the jarl heard of this highwayman he went to the place with his men and seized Hervör and brought her home with him; after that she dwelt at his house for a while.

One day Hervör chanced to be standing near some slaves, and she treated them ill, as she did everyone else. Then one of them said to her, 'Your only wish is to do evil, Hervör, and evil is to be expected from you; the jarl forbids everyone to speak to you of your parentage, because he is ashamed that you should know of it—for the basest serf lay with his daughter, and you are their child.'

Hervör was enraged at these words, and she went at once to the jarl, and said:

(13) Little can I glory  
in our lofty name,  
though Fródmarr's favour  
was found by my mother<sup>3</sup>;  
I thought that I had  
a hero for father,  
but now I am told  
he tended the swine!

---

<sup>2</sup> This custom undoubtedly prevailed in Iceland, Norway and the Orkneys during the heathen age without any connection with Christian baptism; but its ultimate origin may nonetheless lie in contact with the Christian peoples of the British Isles, for there is no record of it from Swedish or South Germanic territory. (K. Maurer, *Die Wasserweihe des german. heidentums*, 1880.)

<sup>3</sup> On these puzzling lines see Appendix F

The jarl answered:

- (14) A lie has been told you  
with little substance:  
high among heroes  
men held your father;  
Angantýr's hall  
with earth sprinkled  
stands on Sámsey's  
southern border.

Hervör spoke:

- (15) Foster-father,  
I am filled with longing  
to seek them out,  
my slain kinsmen,  
for store of wealth  
they surely own;  
to me shall it pass  
if I perish not!
- (16) I will wrap swiftly  
around my hair  
a linen headgear<sup>1</sup>  
ere I hasten away;  
much rests on it,  
that when morning comes  
cloak and kirtle  
be cut for me.

Afterwards Hervör spoke to her mother, and said:

- (17) As quick as you can  
equip me in all ways,

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless these lines imply 'I will bind up my hair so that I may be taken for a man,' one must follow *Skj.* in emending *um* to *af*, and translate: 'the linen cloth shall be taken from my hair,' i.e. Hervör will cast away her woman's attire.

wisest of women,  
 as you would your son!  
 In dreams is told me  
 the truth only;  
 no contentment  
 shall I taste here now.

After that she made ready to depart alone, and taking the gear and weapons of a man she made her way to a place where there were some vikings, and for a time she went roving with them and called herself Hervard. A short while after, this Hervard became captain of the band, and when they came to Sámsey she demanded to be allowed to go up on the island, saying that there would be promise of treasure in the burial-mound; but all the men of the company spoke against it, saying that such creatures of evil walked there both by day and by night that it was worse there in daylight than in many other places in the dark. But at last she had her way, and the anchor was dropped; Hervard got into a boat, and rowing to the shore landed in Munarvág at the hour of sunset, and there came upon a man who tended a flock.

He spoke<sup>1</sup>:

(18) Who among mortals  
 moves on the island?  
 Now flee you fast  
 to find shelter!

She answered:

(19) Flee I will not  
 to find shelter,  
 none do I know  
 of the native people<sup>2</sup>;  
 rather tell me  
 ere we turn away:  
 where do the cairns lie  
 called after Hjörvard?

---

<sup>1</sup> The *HU*-version has more verses here than *R* has; see Appendix A (IV).

<sup>2</sup> *eyjar-skeggjar*, lit. 'island-bearded,' a name (found also elsewhere) supposed to have arisen simply from the unkempt hair and wild appearance of the dwellers on remote islands.

Then the herdsman said:

- (20) Do not ask me —  
 you are not wise!  
 Friend of vikings,  
 you are far astray;  
 fare we as fast as  
 feet can bear us —  
 out in the open  
 all is evil for men.

She answered:

- (21) We'll not faint nor fear  
 at such fire's crackling,  
 though all the land  
 be alight with flame;  
 men such as these  
 are matter too small  
 to make us tremble —  
 let us talk further!

He spoke:

- (22) Fool I call him  
 who fares onward,  
 a man all alone  
 in the murky night;  
 fires are moving,  
 mounds are opening,  
 burns field and fen —  
 let us faster run!

And he ran off home to the farm, and thus they parted. Now Hervör saw where out upon the island burned the fire of the barrows,<sup>1</sup> and she went towards it without fear, though all the mounds were on her path. She made her way into these fires as if they were no more than mist, until she came to the barrow of the berserks.

---

<sup>1</sup> *hauga-eldrinn*: the fire that burns over treasure hidden in burial-mounds, called also *málmlogi* or *vaflogi*, 'metal-fire,' 'hovering fire,' a widespread belief for many ages; many examples from a later period are given by Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og Æfintýri* I, 1862, 276 ff.

Then she spoke:

- (23) Wake, Angantýr,  
wakes you Hervör,  
Sváfa's<sup>1</sup> offspring,  
your only daughter;  
the keen-edged blade  
from the barrow give me,  
the sword dwarf-smithied  
for Sigrlami.
- (24) Hervard, Hjörvard,  
Hrani, Angantýr!  
From the roots of the tree  
I arouse you all,  
with<sup>2</sup> helm and corslet,  
keen-edged weapon,  
gear and buckler  
and graven spear.
- (25) All but to dust  
have Arngrím's children,  
men of evil,  
in the mound been turned,<sup>3</sup>  
if of Eyfura's sons  
no single one  
to me will speak  
in Munarvág.
- (26) Hervard, Hjörvard,  
Hrani, Angantýr!  
May it seem to you all  
within your ribs  
as if in mound of maggots

---

<sup>2</sup> The second half of this verse may refer to Hervör (cf. verse ii in Appendix A (V)), or to the dead berserks, who were 'laid in a mound on Sámsey with all their weapons.'

<sup>3</sup> Lit. 'Arngrím's sons have as good as become increase of mould' (*moldar-auki*), i.e. they have nearly turned to dust in the barrow.

you mouldered away,  
 if you fetch not the sword  
 forged by Dvalin<sup>1</sup>;  
 it becomes not ghosts  
 costly arms to bear.

Then Angantýr answered her:

(27) Why do you hail me,  
 Hervör, daughter?  
 To your doom you are faring  
 filled with evil!  
 Mad you are now,  
 your mind darkened,<sup>2</sup>  
 when with wits wandering  
 you wake the dead.

(28)<sup>3</sup> No father or kinsman  
 in cairn laid me;  
 they kept Týrfing,  
 the two survivors<sup>4</sup> —  
 one alone did  
 wield it after.

Hervör answered:

(29)<sup>5</sup> You give me a lie!  
 May the god let you  
 rest whole in your howe  
 if you're holding not  
 Týrfing with you;  
 unwilling you are  
 to give the heirloom  
 to your only child.

<sup>2</sup> These two lines are found in three poems of the Edda (*Lex. Poet.* s.v. *ærr*).

<sup>3</sup> Two lines are clearly missing from this verse, probably after line 2; Bugge suggested 'It was our slayers who laid us in the mound' (implying 'And so I did not receive my sword in burial').

<sup>4</sup> i.e. the two who were still alive when Angantýr died, Hjalmar and Arrow-Odd.

<sup>5</sup> This verse is obviously badly corrupted. No doubt originally there was a stop at the end of the fourth line: 'if you have it not!'

Then the barrow opened, and it was as if the whole mound were fire and flame. Angantýr spoke again:

- (30) Hel's gate is lifted,  
howes are opening,  
the isle's border  
ablaze before you;  
grim outside now  
to gaze around you —  
to your ships, if you can,  
quick now, maiden!

She answered:

- (31) No blaze can you light,  
burning in darkness,  
that your funeral fires  
should with fear daunt me;  
unmoved shall remain  
the maiden's spirit,<sup>1</sup>  
though she gaze on a ghost  
in the grave-door standing.

Then Angantýr said:

- (32) I tell you, Hervör —  
hear my words out! —  
what shall come to pass,  
prince's daughter:  
trust what I tell you,  
Tyrfing, daughter,  
shall be ruin and end  
of all your family.<sup>2</sup>
- (33) You<sup>3</sup> shall bear offspring  
who in after days  
shall wield Tyrfing  
and trust in his strength;

---

<sup>2</sup> On the significance of this prophecy see Introduction pp. x-xi.

<sup>3</sup> It is strange that Angantýr, who is not yet persuaded to yield up the sword, should here tell Hervör that she will have a son who will, in fact, wield it. The verse must be displaced from a point later in the poem.



by the name Heidrek  
known to his people,  
born the strongest  
beneath the sun's curtain.<sup>1</sup>

Then Hervör said:

- (34) A human indeed  
I was held to be  
ere I came hither  
your hall seeking;  
hater of mailcoats  
from the mound give me,  
peril to bucklers,  
bane of Hjálmar!

Angantýr answered:

- (35) Beneath my back is laid  
the bane of Hjálmar,  
all around it  
enwrapped with fire;  
in the world walking  
no woman know I  
who would dare in her hand  
to hold this sword.

Then Hervör said:

- (36) I will guard it  
and grasp it in hand,  
the keen-edged sword,  
can I but obtain it;  
no fear have I  
of the fire burning;  
the flame grows less  
as I look towards it.

---

<sup>1</sup> *rǫðuls tjald*: *tjald* means a tent, curtaining, or wall-hangings; it is common in kennings for the sky, as here. — After this verse there is an omission of two in *R*, which are given in Appendix A (V).

Angantýr answered:

- (37) Fool you are, Hervör,  
in your heart's daring,  
with eyes open  
to enter the fire!  
The blade from the barrow  
I will bring, rather;  
O young maiden,  
I may not refuse you.

Hervör answered:

- (38) Son of warriors,  
you do well in this,  
the blade to me  
from the barrow yielding;  
king, to keep it  
I count it dearer  
than were all Norway  
beneath my hand.

Angantýr spoke:

- (39) You see it not —  
you're in speech accursed,  
woman of evil! —  
why you're rejoicing;  
trust what I tell you,  
Tyrfing, daughter,  
shall be ruin and end  
of all your family.

Hervör spoke:

- (40) I will go my way  
to the wave-horses,<sup>1</sup>  
chieftain's daughter  
cheerful-hearted;

---

<sup>1</sup> *gjálfr-marr* 'sea-horse,' i.e. ship

I care not at all  
O kings' companion,  
how my sons shall  
strive hereafter.

Angantýr spoke:

(41) You shall keep Tyrting  
with contentment long;  
the bane of Hjálmar  
in hiding keep;  
touch not the edges —  
in each is poison;  
worse than deadly,  
doom-bringer to men.

(42) Fare well, daughter!  
fain would I give you  
twelve heroes' lives —  
trust what I tell you! —  
the goodly strength  
and strong endurance  
that Arngrím's sons  
left after them.

And now Hervör said:

(43) May you all lie unharmed  
in the howe resting —  
to hasten hence  
my heart urges;  
I seemed to myself  
to be set between worlds,  
when all about me  
burnt the cairn-fires.

## 4

Now Hervör went down to the shore, and when the dawn came she saw that the ships were gone, and that the vikings had taken fright when they heard the thunders and saw the fires on the island.

Hervör tarried then on Sámsey until she got a passage away, and of her travels nothing more is told until she came to King Gudmund<sup>1</sup> of Glasisvellir; she still called herself Hervard, and behaved like any warrior. This Hervard was received extremely well. King Gudmund had a great following; and he was then so old that his years were not short of a hundred, so men say, yet he was still an active man. His son Höfund was at that time a grown man, and he was summoned to counsel in all matters of great moment.

It happened one day that King Gudmund was playing at chess, and was getting very much the worst of the game; the king asked whether there was anyone who could give him advice on his play. Then Hervard stood up and went to the board, and did not long have a hand in the game before the king's fortune turned. But while Hervard was at chess one of the king's courtiers had taken up the sword Tyrfing and drawn it, saying that he had never seen a better blade; and when Hervard heard this, and saw Tyrfing unsheathed, as it flashed like a sunbeam through the hall, she swung round and snatched the sword and struck off the head of the man who had drawn it. After that Hervard at once went out. The king's men egged one another on to pursue Hervard and take revenge for their companion; but the king spoke and told them to be still—'for your vengeance on this man,' he said, 'will seem smaller than you now think, because it is my guess that he is a woman; but I think that with that weapon which she wields her slaying will be dearly bought by every man of you.'

Hervör went off to join vikings, and was out raiding for a time; and when she grew weary of that she went to Bjarmar the jarl, and settled down to fine work with her hands. Many tales were then told of her beauty.

Höfund, the son of King Gudmund, asked his father to make a match for him, for he wished to marry. King Gudmund received this well, and said that Hervör the daughter of Angantýr was then at the house of the jarl Bjarmar, her foster-father; this match, he said, was thought the best and the most illustrious of any that he knew of. Then

men were sent to jarl Bjarmar to negotiate, and the jarl received it well; Hervör did not refuse, and told the jarl to act on her behalf. And so it was resolved, and Hervör was married to Höfund.

They had two sons; the elder was called Angantýr, and the younger Heidrek. Both of them were beautiful in face, and bigger and stronger than other men; both were wise in understanding and men of the greatest accomplishment. Angantýr was like his father in nature, and wished everybody well; his father loved him deeply, and he was much liked by the whole people. But as much good as Angantýr did, so much more mischief than any other man did Heidrek do; and it was him that Hervör loved the more. Höfund sent Heidrek away to be fostered by Gizur,<sup>1</sup> wisest of men, and with him Heidrek was brought up.

One day Höfund had a great feast made at Grund, and he invited to it all the men of rank in his kingdom, except Heidrek and Gizur. And when the feast was prepared and men sat drinking, in walked Heidrek the king's son; no-one there was glad to see him. Angantýr offered him a seat beside him, and that Heidrek accepted.

He was gloomy, and sat drinking far into the evening; but when his brother Angantýr went out Heidrek began to talk to the men who were next to him, and such a turn did he give to his words that they fell out, and each abused the other; but then Angantýr came back and told them to be still. Again a second time, when Angantýr had gone out, Heidrek reminded them of what they had said; and it ended with one of them striking the other with his fist. Then Angantýr came up and told them to be at peace till morning. But when Angantýr went away for the third time Heidrek asked the man who had been given the blow whether he had not the courage to avenge himself; and he so worked on him with his persuasions that the one who had been struck leapt up and slew his bench-fellow. Then Angantýr came in. But when Höfund heard of this he told Heidrek to go away and make no more mischief at that time; and afterwards Heidrek went out with his brother Angantýr into the courtyard, and there they parted.

When Heidrek had walked from the buildings for a short time, it came into his heart that he had not yet done enough harm, and turning back towards the hall he took up a great stone and hurled it in the direction from which he heard men talking together in the darkness. He

heard that the stone did not miss its mark, and he went there and found a man lying dead; and he recognised his brother Angantýr.

Then Heidrek went into the hall and stood before his father, and told him what had come to pass. Höfund said that Heidrek must go, and never come into his sight again; he said that he deserved rather to be struck down or hanged. Then Hervör the queen spoke and said that Heidrek's act indeed deserved ill, but that the vengeance would be heavy if he were never again to enter the realm of his father and to journey thus empty-handed away. But the word of Höfund carried such weight that things went as he had given judgment, and no-one was bold enough to dare gainsay it, or sue for peace for Heidrek. Then the queen asked Höfund to give him some good advice<sup>1</sup> at their parting.

Höfund said that in few matters would he give him counsel, and that he thought it would be of little use to him—'but since you ask this, queen, this counsel I give him first, that he give no help to a man who has slain his lord; and I counsel him second, never to deliver a man who has murdered his fellow; third, not to allow his wife to be often visiting her kinsfolk, even though she entreat him; fourth, not to be late abroad with his mistress; fifth, not to ride his best horse when he is in a great hurry; and sixth, never to foster the son of a man more powerful than he is himself.<sup>2</sup> But I think it more than likely that you will make no use of this.'

Heidrek said that Höfund had given this advice with evil intent, and that he was not obliged to observe it. Then he went out of the hall. His mother rose and went out with him; she accompanied him out of the courtyard, and said, 'My son, you have now so done for yourself that you will not be thinking of coming back, and I can do little to help you. But here is a mark<sup>3</sup> of gold and a sword, which I will give you; the sword is called 'Tyrfing, which your mother's father, Angantýr the berserk, owned—there is no-one so ignorant that he has not heard tell of him; and if you find yourself where blows are being given, never let it leave your mind how often 'Tyrfing has gained the victory.' She wished him farewell; and then they parted.

## 5

Now when Heidrek had journeyed for a little while he fell in with some men, and one of them was bound; they asked each other for news, and Heidrek asked what the man had done, who was treated in this way. They answered that he had betrayed his lord. Then Heidrek asked if they would accept a ransom for him, and when they said that they would he gave them half a mark of gold, and they let the man go free. He offered Heidrek his service, but he answered, 'Why should you, who have betrayed your own lord, be any more faithful to me, a stranger? Get away from me!'

Not long after Heidrek again met some men, and one of them bound. He asked what crime he had committed, and they told him that he had murdered his comrade. He asked if they would take a ransom for him; they said that they would, and he gave them the other half mark of gold. This man also offered Heidrek his service, but again he refused it.

Long were the roads that Heidrek travelled after that, until he came to the country called Reidgotaland.<sup>1</sup> There ruled a king whose name was Harald, very aged, and he had held a great realm under his hand; he had no son. But his authority was diminished, for there were certain jarls, who made war upon him with their army; he had fought with them, but always been worsted; and now they had made peace on the condition that every twelve months the king should pay them tribute. In this land Heidrek rested, and dwelt with the king over winter.

Now it happened one time that a great quantity of goods and money was brought to the king, and Heidrek asked whether this was tribute to him; but the king replied that the case was very different — 'I must pay this money out in tribute myself.' Heidrek said that it was a shameful thing that a king who had held dominion over so wide a realm should pay tribute to these evil jarls, and that it would be a better course to make war upon them; but the king answered that he had attempted that, and been worsted.

'I would best be able to repay you for your good favour,' said Heidrek then, 'by becoming the leader of this enterprise; and it has come into my mind that if I had the men it would not seem to me a great matter to fight<sup>2</sup> with men of higher estate than these are.'

'I will give you a force of men,' answered the king, 'if you will fight with the jarls, and this expedition will make your fortune, if you succeed in it; but if you deceive yourself, it is more than likely that it is you that will pay dearly for the error.'

After that the king had a great host gathered, and the force was made ready for the campaign; Heidrek was captain of the host. They went then against these jarls, and when they came into their realm they began at once to rob and to ravage. When the jarls heard of it they went out against them with a great army, and at their meeting there arose a mighty battle. Heidrek was in the forefront, and he held 'Tyrfing in his right hand; nothing withstood that sword, neither helm nor corslet, but he slew all before him, and then he rushed forward from the rank and hewed on both sides, and made his way so far into the opposing host that he slew both the jarls. Then some of their army turned to flight, but the most part were slain. Heidrek passed over that land, laying it under tribute to King Harald, as it had been before; and with matters thus he returned home with great triumph and uncounted wealth. King Harald had him met with great honour, and invited him to stay with him, and possess as great a domain as he should ask for.

Then Heidrek asked for the daughter of King Harald, whose name was Helga, and she was married to him; and Heidrek took over the rule of half the realm of King Harald. Heidrek had a son by his wife, and he was called Angantýr; King Harald also had a son in his old age, but his name is not told.<sup>1</sup>



## 6

At that time there came so great a famine upon Reidgotaland that it seemed likely to lay waste the land. Then lots were cast by soothsayers, the sacrificial chip<sup>2</sup> cast<sup>1</sup> and augury made, and the answer came that there would never be plenty in Reidgotaland until the highest-born youth in the land was sacrificed. King Harald declared that Heidrek's son was the noblest-born, but Heidrek held that it was King Harald's; and this deadlock no-one could resolve until recourse was had to King Höfund, whose decisions were always to be trusted. Heidrek was chosen as leader for this journey, and with him many other noble men. When Heidrek met his father he was well received, and he told him all his errand, and asked him for his judgment. Höfund said that it was Heidrek's son who was the most noble in that land.

'It seems to me,' said Heidrek then, 'that you condemn my son to death; and what then do you adjudge me for the loss of him?'

King Höfund answered, 'You must demand that every fourth man<sup>3</sup> who is present at the sacrifice be put under your authority, or else you will not surrender your son to the sacrifice; after that there will be no need to advise you on what you should do.'

---

between sacrifice and divination (*hlaut* 'sacrificial blood' and *hlutr* 'lot' are related words), and it seems likely that the twigs of sortilege were dipped in the blood of the victims. The question is discussed by J. de Vries, *Altgerm. Religion*. I § 211, II § 116.

<sup>3</sup> *H* and *U* say 'every other man'; *R*'s *iiii hverr* is probably an error for *annarr hverr*.

## 7

Now when Heidrek came home to Reidgotaland a council was called; and Heidrek began thus: 'This was the decree of King Höfund my father, that it is my son who is the highest-born in this country, and he is chosen for the sacrifice; but in exchange I will have authority over every fourth man who has come to this council; and it is my wish that you grant this to me.'

And so it was done, and the men joined his following. Then Heidrek had his host mustered with a trumpet-blast, and he set up a standard, and attacked King Harald; a great battle arose, and there fell the king and a great part of his host. Heidrek laid under him all the realm that had been King Harald's, and became king over it. He said that he would deliver up instead of his son all the host that had been killed, and he gave the slain to Ódin.<sup>1</sup> His wife was so wrathful at the death of her father that she hanged herself in the hall of the Dís.<sup>2</sup>

One summer King Heidrek went south with his army into the land of the Huns and fought with the king, who was named Humli, and defeated him; there he captured his daughter, Sifka, and brought her home with him. But he sent her back the summer after, she being then with child; the boy was called Hlöd, in appearance the most beautiful of men, and he was brought up by Humli, his mother's father.

One summer King Heidrek went with his army to Saxland.<sup>3</sup> When the king of the Saxons heard of this he invited Heidrek to a feast, and told him to take such of his dominions as he wished; this offer Heidrek accepted. There he saw the king's daughter, fair and beautiful in face; he asked for her, and she was married to him. So the feast was made a double one, and afterwards Heidrek went home with his wife and took with her uncounted treasure.

King Heidrek became now a great warrior, and greatly extended his kingdom in many ways. His wife often asked to visit her father, and he indulged her in that; her stepson Angantýr went with her.

---

unique; it is conceivable that the temple of a goddess is meant (cf. *Vanadís* as a name of Freyja, *SnE.* 38).

<sup>3</sup> Saxland: (Northern) Germany

One summer, when Heidrek was out on a foray, he came to Saxland, the realm of his wife's father; he laid his ships into a hidden creek and went ashore with one other man. They came at night to the king's dwelling and went to the chamber where his wife used to sleep, and the watchmen were not aware of their coming. Heidrek went into the chamber and saw that a man slept beside her, a man with fair hair on his head. The man who was with the king said that Heidrek was one to be vengeful over lesser things than that, but the king answered, 'I shall not do it now.'

He took the boy Angantýr, who lay in another bed, and he cut a great lock of hair from the head of the man who slept in his wife's arms, and taking both the boy and the lock of hair away with him he went back to his ships.

Next morning he put into the anchorage, and all the people came out to meet him, and a feast was prepared. Heidrek had a meeting called, and there great news was told to him, that his son Angantýr had died a sudden death. 'Show me the corpse!' said the king.

The queen said that that would only add to his grief; but nonetheless he was brought to the place, and there was a cloth folded up, and inside it a dog.

'My son has had a change for the worse,' said King Heidrek, 'if he has turned into a dog.'

Then he had the boy brought to the meeting, and saying that he had discovered great treachery in the queen he made plain the whole affair. He commanded that every man who could come to that meeting should be summoned to it, and when almost all the people had come he said, 'He of the golden curls is still not here.' A further search was made, and the man was found in the kitchen, with a band about his head. Many there wondered why a base slave should be wanted at the meeting; but when the man came there King Heidrek said, 'Here now may you see the one whom the king's daughter prefers to me.'

Then he took up the lock and tried it against the man's hair, and there was no question of its not matching. 'But you, king,' said Heidrek, 'have always dealt well with us, and therefore your kingdom shall have peace from us; but your daughter I will keep no longer.'

Then Heidrek went home into his own kingdom, together with his son.

One summer King Heidrek sent men into Gardaríki with the errand of inviting the son of the king of Gardar<sup>1</sup> to be fostered in his house; for Heidrek meant now to try breaking all his father's good counsels. The messengers came into the presence of the king of Gardar and told him their errand and message of friendship; but the king said that it was not likely he would hand over his son to a man who was known for his many evil qualities.

Then the queen said, 'Do not say that, lord! You have heard how great a conqueror he is, and it would be greater wisdom to accept the honour he offers you, or else your kingdom will not remain at peace.'

'You will do a great deal to bring this about,' said the king.

Then the boy was delivered over to the messengers, and they departed home. King Heidrek received the boy well and gave him a good upbringing, and loved him dearly. Sifka, Humli's daughter, was then for a second time with the king<sup>2</sup>; and he had been given counsel that he should not tell her anything that must be kept secret.

One summer the king of Gardar sent word to Heidrek to come out east and be his guest at a feast and friendly meeting. Then Heidrek made ready to go with a great company of men, together with the king's son and Sifka. Heidrek came now east into Gardaríki and was entertained there to a noble feast.

One day during this feast the kings went to the woods to hunt with hawks and hounds, and many men with them; and when they had slipped the hounds they went their separate ways in the forest. Foster-father and foster-son found themselves alone together. Then Heidrek said to the prince, 'Do what I tell you, foster-son; there is a farm not far from here: go there and hide yourself, and take this ring for your pains; and be ready to come home when I have you sent for.'

The boy said that he did not like the business, but nonetheless he did as the king said. Heidrek came home in the evening and was downcast; he sat at his drink only a little time. When he came to bed, Sifka said, 'Why are you sad, lord? What troubles you? Are you sick? Tell me!'

'It is a hard thing for me to tell of,' answered the king, 'for my life is at stake if it is not kept secret.'

Sifka said she would not give it away, and was affectionate towards him, pressing for an answer with a show of love. At last he said to her,

'The king's son and I were standing together, the two of us, beside a tree, and my foster-son asked for an apple that grew high up on the tree. Then I drew Tyrfing and cut down the apple, and it was done before I remembered what spell was laid on the sword, that it should prove the death of a man if it were drawn; but we two were alone. Then I killed the boy.'

On the next day at the drinking the queen of Gardar asked Sifka why Heidrek was so gloomy. 'There is reason enough for that!' she answered; 'he has slain your son and the king's!' — and then she told the whole story.

'This is terrible news,' said the queen; 'we must not let it get abroad.' Then she went at once out of the hall in great grief. The king, seeing this, called Sifka to him and said, 'What were you speaking of with the queen, that has troubled her so greatly?'

'There is much cause for it, lord,' said Sifka; 'Heidrek has slain your son, and it is like enough that he has done it deliberately; he deserves death!'

The king of Gardar commanded that Heidrek be seized and set in shackles; 'and now,' he said, 'things have fallen out as I surmised.'

But King Heidrek had made himself so well-liked that no-one would do this. Then two men rose up in the hall, and said that there was nothing to stop them, and they laid fetters on the king; but both those men Heidrek had redeemed from death. Then Heidrek sent men out secretly to fetch the prince; but the king of Gardar had his people summoned by the trumpet, and told them that he would have Heidrek hanged. At that moment the king's son came running to his father and begged him not to think of doing that loathsome deed, the slaying of his foster-father and the noblest of men.

## 8

Heidrek was now released, and at once he prepared to set out on his journey home. 'Lord,' said the queen then, 'do not let Heidrek depart thus, without your being reconciled; that will be of no profit to your kingdom. Offer him rather gold and silver.'

The king did this, and had a great quantity of money borne to King Heidrek, saying that he wished to give it to him, and to have his friendship once more.

But Heidrek answered, 'I have no lack of money.'

The king told the queen of this, and she said, 'Offer him then a dominion, great possessions and many liegemen.'

The king did so, but Heidrek said, 'I have abundance of possessions and a multitude of followers.'

The king of Gardar told this also to the queen, and she said, 'Then offer him what he will accept: your daughter.'

'I did not think that I should ever come to that,' said the king; 'but you shall have your way.'

Then the king of Gardar went to meet King Heidrek and said, 'Rather than that we part unreconciled, I would have you take my daughter, with as great honour as you yourself shall choose.' And now this offer Heidrek accepted gladly, and the daughter of the king of Gardar went home with him.

King Heidrek was now at home, and he wished to rid himself of Sifka; he took his best horse, and it was late in the evening. They came to a river, and she grew too heavy for the horse, so that it collapsed from exhaustion; but the king left it and walked on. He then had to carry her over the river; there was nothing else for it, but to cast her down from his shoulders and break her backbone, and so he left her drifting away dead down the stream.

Then King Heidrek had a great feast prepared, and he married the daughter of the king of Gardar. Their daughter was named Hervör; she was a warrior woman, and she was brought up in England with Fródmarr the jarl.<sup>1</sup>

King Heidrek now settled down in his kingdom, and he became a great lord, and very wise. He had a great boar reared, which was as

huge as the strongest fully-grown bulls, and so fair of coat that every hair seemed to be of gold.<sup>1</sup> The king laid one hand on the head of the boar and the other on its bristles, and swore that no man had ever done him so great a wrong that he should not have just judgment from his counsellors, those twelve who had to tend the boar; or else he should propound riddles which the king could not solve. King Heidrek now became a man of many friends.

## 9

There was a man called Gestumblindi,<sup>1</sup> a powerful man and a great enemy of King Heidrek. The king sent him word to come and be reconciled, if he cared for his life. Now Gestumblindi was no great sage, and because he knew that he was incapable of vying with the king in words, and knew too that it would go heavy with him if he had to abide by the judgment of the wise men, for his crimes were many, he decided on this plan: to sacrifice to Ódin for help, to ask him to look after his case, and to promise him many gifts.

Late one evening there came a knock upon the door, and when Gestumblindi went to it he saw that there was a man there. He asked him what his name was, and the stranger called himself Gestumblindi, and said that they were to change clothes. This they did, and then Gestumblindi went away and concealed himself; but the stranger went into the house, and everyone thought that they recognised Gestumblindi; and the night passed away.

On the next day this Gestumblindi made his way to see the king, and gave him a respectful greeting. The king sat silent.

'Lord,' said Gestumblindi, 'I have come here because I wish to be reconciled with you.'

'Will you submit to the judgment of my wise men?' answered the king.

'Are there no other ways of redeeming myself?' asked Gestumblindi.

'There are others,' said the king, 'if you think yourself able to propound riddles.'

'I have no great skill in that,' Gestumblindi replied, 'but the other way seems hard.'

'Then will you rather submit to the judgment of my counsellors?' asked the king.

'I choose rather to propound riddles,' said Gestumblindi.

'That is right and fitting,' said the king.

Then said Gestumblindi:

(44) Would that I had now  
what I had yesterday,  
find out what that was;



mankind it mars,  
 speech it hinders,  
 yet speech it will inspire.  
 'This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it.<sup>1</sup> Bring him some ale! — that mars the wits of many a man, and many are the more talkative when ale gets the upper hand; but with some the tongue gets all entangled, so that no word comes out.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(45) From home I journeyed  
 and from home faring<sup>2</sup>  
 I looked on a way of ways;  
 a way there was under  
 and a way over,  
 and on all sides ways there were.  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. You went across a bridge over a river, and the way of the river was beneath you, but birds flew over your head and on either side of you, and that was their way.'<sup>3</sup>

Then said Gestumblindi:

(46) What drink was it  
 I drank yesterday;  
 it was not wine nor water,  
 nor mead, nor ale,  
 nor aught of food,  
 yet thirstless thence I fared?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

<sup>1</sup> The phrase *Góð er gáta þín, getit er þessar* is a regular long line, and was perhaps a formula of introduction to riddle-solutions (Heusler, *Rätsel* 137).

<sup>2</sup> This curious repetition is paralleled in the Eddaic poem *Fjölsvinnsmál* 46: *Hvaðan þú fórt, hvaðan þú fór gerðir?*

<sup>3</sup> The sixth line of the verse probably refers in fact to the 'Earth-way' (*fold-vegr*), the earth simply, for lines 4–6 seem to refer to three different 'ways,' River, Sky, Earth. But none of the texts report the king as solving the riddle in this way.

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. You lay in the shade, and dew had fallen on the grass, and thus you cooled your lips and quenched your thirst.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(47) Who is that shrill one  
on hard ways walking,  
paths he has passed before;  
many are his kisses  
for of mouths he has two,  
and on gold alone he goes?  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. That is the hammer, which is used in the goldsmith's art; it screams shrilly when it beats on the hard anvil, and the anvil is its "path".'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(48) What strange marvel  
did I see without,  
in front of Delling's door<sup>1</sup>;  
two things lifeless,  
twain unbreathing,  
were seething a stalk of wounds?<sup>2</sup>  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. Those are smith's bellows; they have no wind unless they are blown, and they are as lifeless as any other work of smith's craft, but with them one can as well forge a sword as anything else.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

---

<sup>2</sup> 'They boiled a wound-leek,' i.e. they forged a sword. The characteristic periphrasis *sára-laukr* (it is found elsewhere) thus moves out of the sphere of poetic device (kenning) into that of riddle simply by virtue of its context; similarly at verse 65/6, etc.

(49) What strange marvel  
did I see without,  
in front of Delling's door;  
eight are its feet  
and four its eyes,  
and knees above belly it bears?  
'This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Spiders,' said the king.  
Then said Gestumblindi:

(50) What strange marvel  
did I see without,  
in front of Delling's door;  
its head turning  
to Hel downward,  
but its feet ever seek the sun?  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. It is the leek; its head is fast in the ground, but it forks as it grows up.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(51) What strange marvel  
did I see without,  
in front of Delling's door;  
harder than ram's horn,  
than raven blacker,  
more straight than shaft,  
than shield whiter?<sup>1</sup>  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddles become trifling, Gestumblindi,' said Heidrek; 'what

---

original; in *SnE*. 24 it is said that a thing washed in the well of Urd becomes 'whiter than what is called *skjall*, which lies within the egg-shell.'

need is there to spend more time at this? — That is the obsidian, with a sunbeam shining on it.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(52) Pale-haired bondmaids,  
two brides together,  
carried to the storehouse  
a cask of ale;  
no hand turned it,  
no hammer forged it,<sup>1</sup>  
yet outside the islands  
upright sat its maker.  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. Female swans<sup>2</sup> go to their nests and lay their eggs; the egg-shell is not made by hand nor is it forged by hammer; and the swan by whom they engendered the eggs bears himself erect, outside the islands.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(53) What women are they  
on the wild mountain;  
woman by woman begets,  
a girl by a girl  
begets a son —  
yet no men do these maidens know?  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. These are two angelicas, and a young angelica<sup>3</sup> between them.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

<sup>2</sup> *H* says 'Eider-ducks,' but the agreement of *R* and *U*, and also perhaps the adjectives *bleikhaddaðar* and *qrðigr*, show that 'Swans' is the original solution.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. a young angelica-shoot growing up from the same root as the other full-grown stalks. A species of angelica (*hvonn*) is common in the far north of Europe and was much used for flavouring; in *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar* (ch. 92) it is mentioned as being sold in the market at Nidarós.

(54)<sup>1</sup> A dweller in the soil  
 I saw passing,  
 a corpse<sup>2</sup> on a corpse there sat;  
 blind upon blind one  
 to the billows<sup>3</sup> riding,  
 on a steed without breath it was borne.  
 'This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. You came upon a dead horse on an icefloe, and on the horse a dead snake, and they all floated together down the river.'<sup>4</sup>

Then said Gestumblindi:

(55) What thanes are they  
 to the thing riding,  
 all at one<sup>5</sup> together;  
 across the lands  
 their liegemen sending  
 seeking a place to settle?  
 'This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. These are Ítrek and Andad,<sup>6</sup> sitting at their chequerboard.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(56) What women are they  
 warring together

---

cipating the solution, a corruption which no doubt crept in before ever the verse was incorporated into *Heiðreks Saga*.

<sup>3</sup> *brimreið*: Norse *reið* meant 'riding' or 'vehicle,' but *brimreið* (once recorded elsewhere) seems to mean 'sea,' as does the cognate O.E. *brim-rad*; it is not impossible that the Norse word was influenced by the English.

<sup>4</sup> The correct solution is probably simply 'dead snake on an icefloe' (Bugge, *NS* 358), *blindr* and *nár* designating the dead snake, *blindum* and *nái* the icefloe, for in riddling language all inanimate objects may be called 'dead' and 'blind' (cf. verse 48). The horse (*jór*) is simply the icefloe.

<sup>5</sup> If the 'thanes' who ride to the 'thing' (meeting) are the kings in chess, one would not expect them to be called either *sáttir* or *sextán* (sixteen); but in fact it is not clear what the game is (*tafl* may mean any sort of board-game).

<sup>6</sup> *Ítrekr* may have been a name for Ódin, and *Anduðr* or *Qnduðr* is found in a list of giant-names, so that it is just conceivable that the pieces in this game were thought of as representing a conflict between the gods and the giants. The solution in *H* is: *pat er tafl Ítreks konungs*.

before their defenceless king<sup>1</sup>;  
 day after day  
 the dark guard him,  
 but the fair go forth to attack?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. This is the game of *hnefatafl*; the darker ones defend the *hnefi*, but the white ones attack.'<sup>2</sup>

Then said Gestumblindi:

(57) Who is it lonely  
 in the hearth-pit<sup>3</sup> sleeping,  
 solely from stone he's made;  
 for brightness eager<sup>4</sup>  
 he's without parents,  
 and there will he live out his life?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'That is fire hidden in the hearth,' said the king; 'it is struck out of flint.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(58) Who is that great one  
 over ground passing,  
 swallowing water and wood;  
 the wind fearing,  
 but fleeing no man,  
 and waging war on the sun?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed

<sup>2</sup> On the game of *hnefatafl* see Appendix D

<sup>3</sup> The word *psgrúi* (i.e. *psk-grúi*), not otherwise recorded, seems to mean the ash-pit, or hollow in the hearth, where the fire was kept alight overnight.

<sup>4</sup> *fagr-gjarn* is not recorded elsewhere. *U*'s *fár-gjarn* means 'eager for damage.'

it. That is fog; it passes over the earth, so that one cannot see because of it, not even the sun; but it is gone, so soon as the wind gets up.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

- (59) What is that creature  
that kills men's flocks —  
with iron all about it is bound;  
eight its horns are  
but head it has none:  
there are many that move at its side?  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'That is the *húnn* in *hnefatafl*,'<sup>1</sup> said the king.

Then said Gestumblindi:

- (60) What is that creature,  
a cover to the Danes,<sup>2</sup>  
with back gory,  
yet guardian of men;  
spears it encounters,  
to some gives life,  
in its hollow hand  
a man holds his body?<sup>3</sup>  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'That is the shield,' said the king. 'In battles it often becomes bloody, and it is a good protection for those who are nimble with it.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

- (61) Who are those playmates  
that pass over the lands,  
by their father unceasing sought<sup>4</sup>;

angle.' Though called *hnefatafl* in the solutions in both *R* and *H*, this is not the same game as that described in Appendix D.

<sup>2</sup> *Danir* 'Danes,' i.e. 'men' or 'warriors' in general

<sup>3</sup> *R*'s text means that the inner side of the shield is called its *lófi* (palm); *U*'s (reading *guma*) means: 'It (the creature) lays its body against a man's palm.'

<sup>4</sup> *forvitni* means 'curiosity, desire for knowledge,' but the significance of the recurrent formula *at forvitni fǫður* has never been explained.

in time of winter  
 white their shields are,  
 but black they bear in summer?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!<sup>1</sup>

'Those are ptarmigans,' said the king. 'They are white in winter, but black in summer.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(62)<sup>2</sup> What women are they  
 wandering mournful,  
 by their father unceasing sought;  
 to men uncounted  
 they have caused evil,  
 and thus they will live out their lives?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Those are the maids of Hlér<sup>3</sup> who are thus named,' said the king.  
 Then said Gestumblindi;

(63) Who are those maidens  
 going many together,  
 by their father unceasing sought;  
 pale their hair is  
 and their hoods are white,  
 yet these maidens know no man?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Those are the waves that are thus named,' said the king.  
 Then said Gestumblindi:

<sup>1</sup> In this and in several subsequent verses I have restored the address to the king; *H* only misses the lines out once (in a verse where *R* has them). *U* only puts them in a few times, at the beginning of the contest.

<sup>2</sup> On this and the two following riddles, and also verse 67, of which the solution is in every case 'Waves,' see Introduction pp. xviii and xx-xxi.

<sup>3</sup> 'maids of Hlér,' i.e. waves; Hlér (who appears in the solution in *U*) is the sea-god Ægir under another name; his daughters were nine in number, but little is known of him (*SnE.* 78, 116, 175).



- (64) What women are they  
 wandering together,  
 by their father unceasing sought;  
 kind they are but rarely  
 to the race of men,  
 and they must awake in the wind?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Those are the women of Ægir,' said the king; 'that is what the waves are called.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

- (65) A goose grew large,<sup>1</sup>  
 longed for offspring,  
 to build her abode  
 she brought timber;  
 straw-biting swords  
 in safety kept her,  
 lay there above her  
 the booming drink-rock.<sup>2</sup>  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'A duck had built its nest between the jaw-bones of an ox,' said the king, 'and the skull roofed it over.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

- (66) What is that great one  
 that governs much,  
 and half of it Helward turns;  
 with the earth striving,  
 saviour of mortals,  
 if his friend be firm and sure?

---

this' (adding, testily, 'What duck is meant?') and no-one else has been more successful.

<sup>2</sup> *drykkjar drynhraun*: *hraun* meant a stony waste, in Iceland used especially of cold lava-fields. The upper part of the skull is described, apparently, as a scree, with the bones of the head as stones; what the beast drinks is the river which runs down into the depths of the mountain.

This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. That is an anchor with a good rope; if its fluke is in the ground it will keep one safe.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(67) What women are they  
walking in the skerries —  
along the firth they fare;  
white their hoods are  
and hard their bed,  
unstirring when still is the weather?  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Those are the waves,' said the king. 'Their beds are skerries and shingle, and they are not much seen in calm weather.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(68) In season of summer  
at sundown<sup>1</sup> I looked  
on a household astir —  
happy they were not<sup>2</sup>;  
ale men drank there  
without speaking,  
screaming loudly  
stood the ale-butt.  
This riddle ponder,  
O prince Heidrek!

'Piglets were sucking a sow,' said the king, 'and she was squealing.'  
Then said Gestumblindi:

<sup>k</sup> en . . . stóð *R*, en æpandi qlker stóðu *H* and corruptly *U*

<sup>l</sup> þá . . . Gestumblindi *om. R*

<sup>1</sup> *sólbjargir*, lit. 'sun-saving,' sunset; known in various forms from Scandinavian dialects, but not otherwise from the old literature.

<sup>2</sup> *vilgi* can mean 'very much' or 'not at all.' If the latter, as assumed here, the writer is no doubt emphasising the mirthless silence of these particular 'jarls' (see Glossary, s.v.) over their drink.

(69) What strange marvel  
 did I see without,  
 in front of Delling's door;  
 ten its tongues are  
 and twenty its eyes,  
 with forty feet  
 fares that creature?  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'If you are the Gestumblindi I took you for,' said the king then, 'you are cleverer than I thought. You are speaking now of the sow out in the yard.'

Then the king had the sow killed, and it had nine piglets inside it, as Gestumblindi had said.<sup>1</sup> The king now began to suspect who this man must be.

Then said Gestumblindi:

(70) Four are hanging,  
 four are walking,<sup>2</sup>  
 two point the way out,  
 two ward the dogs off,  
 one ever dirty  
 dangles behind it.  
 This riddle ponder,  
 O prince Heidrek!

'Your riddle is good, Gestumblindi,' said the king; 'I have guessed it. That is the cow.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(71)<sup>3</sup> On a sail I sat<sup>4</sup>  
 and saw dead men<sup>5</sup>  
 bearing a blood-vein<sup>6</sup>

---

of homonyms and then replacement of the homonym by a synonym. This kind of thing was called *ofljóst*, and is described in *SnE*. 193.

<sup>4</sup> Here the substitution is: *veggr* = a wall, but *veggr* also = a sail (*segl*).

<sup>5</sup> Here the substitution is: *valr* = a falcon, but *valr* also = the slain (*daudir menn*).

<sup>6</sup> The equation here seems to be: *æðr* = an eider-duck, but *æðr* also = a vein (*blóðs-hol*, 'blood-cavity, blood-hollow,' not elsewhere recorded). This seems satisfactory, but has not been accepted by recent editors.

to the bark of a tree.<sup>1</sup>

This riddle ponder,

O prince Heidrek!

'In this,' said the king, 'you sat on a wall and saw a falcon bearing an eider-duck to the crags.'

Then said Gestumblindi:

(72) Who are those twain

that on ten feet run,

three their eyes are

but only one tail?

This riddle ponder,

O prince Heidrek!

'Thus it is,' said the king, 'when Ódin rides upon Sleipnir.'<sup>2</sup>

Then said Gestumblindi, 'Tell me this then last of all, if you are wiser than any other king':

(73) What said Ódin

in the ear of Balder,

before he was borne to the fire?<sup>3</sup>

'You alone know that, vile creature!' cried King Heidrek, and he drew Tyrting and slashed at Ódin, but he changed himself into the shape of a hawk and flew away; yet the king, striking after him, took off his tailfeathers, and that is why the hawk has been so short-tailed ever since.

Then Ódin said, 'For this, King Heidrek, that you have attacked me, and would slay me without offence, the basest slaves shall be the death of you.' And after that they parted.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ódin's horse Sleipnir had eight legs, and Ódin only one eye.

<sup>3</sup> On the implications of this last question see Introduction p. xx. Gestumblindi's words before the verse are no doubt themselves founded on verse, but attempts to resurrect it (e.g. Bugge, Kock in *NN* § 3177) are pure guesswork.

<sup>4</sup> Text, translation and commentary for the seven riddles found only in *H* are given in Appendix A (VI).

## 10

It is told that King Heidrek had certain slaves whom he had captured on a viking foray into the west. They were nine in all, of noble families, and they little liked their captivity. One night, when King Heidrek lay in his sleeping-chamber with few men near him, the slaves got themselves weapons and went up to the king's lodging. First they slew the watchmen, and then they advanced on the king's quarters and broke into them; there they slew Heidrek the king and all who were within. They took the sword Tyrfing and all the treasure that was in the house, and carried it off with them; and no-one knew at first who had done this, or where to seek vengeance.

Then Angantýr, the son of King Heidrek, had an assembly summoned, and there he was taken for king over all the realms which King Heidrek had held. At this assembly he made a solemn vow never to sit upon the high seat of his father until he had avenged him.

A little while after the assembly Angantýr departed alone, and wandered far and wide searching for these men. One evening he was walking down to the sea beside the river called Grafá, and there he saw three men in a fishing-boat; presently he saw one of the men catch a fish, and heard him call out to one of his companions to pass him the bait-knife to cut off the fish's head; but the other man said that he could not spare it.

Then the first one said, 'Take the sword from under the head-board, and pass it to me,' and taking it he drew it, and cut off the fish's head; then he spoke a verse:

(74) The pike has paid  
by the pools of Grafá  
for Heidrek's slaying  
under Harvad-fells.<sup>1</sup>

Then Angantýr knew at once that it was Tyrfing. He went away into the forest and stayed there till it was dark; but these fishermen rowed to land and went to the tent which they had, and laid themselves down to sleep. But towards midnight Angantýr came up and pulled

the tent down on top of the slaves, and killed all nine of them; and he took the sword Tyrting, as a sign that he had avenged his father.

And now Angantýr returned home, and immediately afterwards he had a great funeral feast held at the place called Árheimar, on the banks of the Dnieper, to honour the memory of his father.

These<sup>1</sup> were the kings who ruled over the lands in those days, as it is told here:

- (75) Of old they said Humli  
 of Huns was ruler,  
 Gizur of the Gautar,<sup>2</sup>  
 of Goths Angantýr,  
 Valdar the Danes ruled,<sup>3</sup>  
 and the Valir Kjár,<sup>4</sup>  
 Alrek the valiant<sup>5</sup>  
 the English people.

Hlöd, the son of King Heidrek, had been brought up in the halls of King Humli, his mother's father, and he was the most valiant of all men, and the most beautiful in appearance. There was an old saying at that time, that a man was born with weapons or horses; and the explanation of this is that it was said of those weapons which were being made at the time when the man was born, and so likewise with beasts, sheep, oxen, or horses, which were born at the same time: all this was gathered together in honour of men of noble birth, as is told here concerning Hlöd, the son of Heidrek:

- (76) In the Hun-kingdom  
 was Hlöd's birthplace,  
 with sword and cutlass  
 and corslet hanging,  
 ring-adorned helmet<sup>6</sup>

---

for the Celtic peoples; the English cognate still survives in the name Wales. It was also applied to the Romans (O.E. *Rum-walas*); and since *Kjárr* is very probably the Norse transformation of Latin *Caesar*, it is likely that the reference here is to the Eastern Roman Emperor. Cf. *Widsith* (ed. R. W. Chambers, 1912), lines 20, 76-8, and notes.

<sup>5</sup> This king appears in a genealogy in *Flateyjarbók* (I 25), but he is unknown in any English tradition. The change from accusative to nominative here is odd (see textual note).

<sup>6</sup> See Falk, *Altnord. Waffen*. 163

and harsh-edged sword,<sup>1</sup>  
 horse well-broken  
 in the holy forest.<sup>2,3</sup>

Now Hlöd learnt of the death of his father, and learnt too that Angantýr his brother had been made king over all the realm which their father had held. Then Humli the king and Hlöd resolved that Hlöd should go and demand his inheritance from Angantýr his brother, using fair words at first, as is thus told:

(77) Hlöd rode from the east,  
 heir of Heidrek,  
 he came to the court  
 claiming his birthright,  
 to Árheimar,  
 the homes of the Goths;  
 there drank Angantýr  
 arval for Heidrek.

And so Hlöd came to Árheimar with a great following, as is told in this verse:

(78) A man he found lingering  
 late in the open<sup>4</sup>  
 by the high dwelling,  
 and hailed him thereafter:  
 Friend, now hasten  
 to the high dwelling,  
 demand of Angantýr  
 that with me he speak!

The man went in, up to the king's table, and hailed Angantýr with fair words; and then he said:

---

famous in the North was the grove at Uppsala where the bodies of the victims were hung. See J. de Vries, *Altgerm. Religion*. I 289 ff.; H. M. Chadwick, *The Cult of Othin*, 1899.

<sup>3</sup> This verse was perhaps originally meant literally, as an expression of that precocity among gods and heroes which is found elsewhere, the preceding prose being an attempt to rationalise it.

<sup>4</sup> *síðfyrull* 'late abroad,' emphasising that the man was not in the hall drinking with the king. Kock's emendation applies the word to Hlöd; he translates it as 'far-travelling' (= *viðfyrull*), comparing O.E. *side and wide* 'far and wide.'

- (79) Hlöd is come here,  
 Heidrek's offspring,  
 your own brother,  
 for battle eager;  
 mighty this youth is  
 mounted on horseback;  
 king!<sup>1</sup> he claims now  
 converse with you.

When the king heard that, he cast down his knife upon the board and rose from the table; he put on his coat of mail, and took his white shield in one hand and the sword Tyrfing in the other. Then there arose a great din within the hall, as is thus told:

- (80) Clamour woke in the court,<sup>2</sup>  
 with the king rising  
 each would hearken  
 to Hlöd's greeting  
 and learn what answer  
 Angantýr gave.

'You are welcome, Hlöd, my brother!' said Angantýr then. 'Come in and drink with us; and first let us drink mead in memory of our father, for concord between us, and for the honour of us all, with all the dignity we have!'

But Hlöd answered, 'We have come here for something other than the filling of our bellies.' Then he said:

- (81) Half will I have  
 of Heidrek's riches,  
 of cow and of calf,  
 of creaking handmill,  
 tools and weapons,  
 treasure<sup>4</sup> undivided,<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The translation 'undivided' is not certain. Bugge took *einn* here as 'unique, remarkable,' comparing *Beowulf* 1458 ('that was one of ancient treasures,' i.e. it was unique among them).

<sup>4</sup> *skatti* has been adduced as a survival of non-Norse language in the poem; for Norse *skattr* always means 'tax, tribute,' whereas here it means 'treasure,' as do the cognate words in O.E., O.H.G., and Gothic. The only other exception is the phrase *Niflunga skattr* (of the Nibelung hoard).



slave and bondmaid  
and their sons and daughters;

- (82) the renowned forest  
that is named Mirkwood,  
the hallowed grave<sup>1</sup>  
in Gothland standing,  
the fair-wrought stone<sup>1</sup>  
beside the Dnieper,  
half the armour<sup>2</sup>  
owned by Heidrek,  
lands and liegemen  
and lustrous rings!

Then Angantýr said, 'You have no title to this land, and you are resolved to deal unjustly'; and then he said:

- (83) The bright buckler  
shall break, kinsman,  
the cold lances  
clash together,<sup>3</sup>  
grim men unnumbered  
in the grass sinking,  
ere the heritage I share  
with Humli's grandson  
or ever Tyrfing  
in twain sunder!

Yet more Angantýr uttered:

<sup>m</sup> thus *U*, 203 (iij *U*, minn 203, for in), lindin blikhvíta *R* (with bad alliteration)

<sup>n</sup> ok kaldr . . . annan *U*, 203, om. *R*

<sup>o</sup> áðr . . . gefa *U*, 203 (tuenn ra *U*, midt 203 for tvau). *R* reads corruptly ek mun Humlung / hálfan láta / eða Tyrfing / í tvau deila. Then follows Þýð ek þér, frændi, til heilla sátta mikit ríki ok ærit fé, tólf hundruð vápna . . . (sc. vápnaðra manna?); here *R* ends

<sup>1</sup> On the grave and the stone see Introduction p. xxv

<sup>2</sup> *herborgir*, 'fortresses' might be thought the more natural demand.

<sup>3</sup> cf. *Beowulf* 3021-2, 'Many a spear cold in the morning (*gar morgenceald*) shall be grasped in hand.'

- (84) I will give you  
gleaming lances,<sup>1</sup>  
wealth and cattle  
well to content you;  
thralls a thousand,  
a thousand horses,  
a thousand bondmen<sup>2</sup>  
bearing armour.
- (85) Each shall get of me  
gifts in plenty,  
nobler than all that  
he now possesses;  
to every man  
shall a maid be given,  
the neck of each  
by necklace clasped.
- (86) I will measure you in silver  
as you sit in your chair,  
upon you departing  
I will pour down gold,  
rings shall go rolling  
round about you<sup>3</sup>;  
a third<sup>4</sup> of Gothland  
shall you govern over.

Gizur Grýtingalíði,<sup>5</sup> the foster-father of King Heidrek, was at

---

there is evidence that in Scandinavia also the word originally meant 'servant.' The same sense-development took place in the English word 'shalk' (*New English Dictionary*, s.v.).

<sup>3</sup> The conception of these lines was discussed by Grimm (*Rechtsalterthümer*, 1828, 668 ff.), who cited from a Frankish text the story of how Theodoric imposed as a penalty on the Visigoths that the Frankish ambassador should sit on his horse outside the Gothic hall, while the Goths cast *solidos* upon him till he and his horse and the point of his lance were covered.

<sup>4</sup> The 'third of Gothland' offered to Hlöd agrees with the clauses of several ancient Germanic laws restricting the inheritance of the baseborn; among the Langobards a bastard inherited one third (Grimm, op. cit. 476).

<sup>5</sup> *Grýtingalíði*, apparently 'vassal or retainer of the *Grýtingar*' (on whom see Introduction p. xxiv). Neckel, however (*Beiträge* 263), held that *líði* was here a distinct word meaning 'lord,' not otherwise recorded in Norse.

that time at the court of King Angantýr; he was now very aged. When he heard Angantýr's offer it seemed to him that he offered too much, and he said:

(87)<sup>1</sup> A bountiful offer  
for a bondmaid's child —  
child of a bondmaid,<sup>2</sup>  
though born to a king!  
The bastard son  
did sit on a mound<sup>3</sup>  
while the prince was  
parting the heritage.

Hlöd became greatly enraged at being called a bastard and the son of a slave-girl, if he should accept his brother's offer,<sup>4</sup> and immediately he went away with all his following, and returned home to the land of the Huns, to King Humli his mother's father, and told him that his brother Angantýr had refused him an equal division of the inheritance.

Humli the king asked then concerning all that had passed, and he was very angry that Hlöd, his daughter's son, should be called the son of a bondmaid; and he said:

(88) In winter unstirring  
let us sit content,  
in converse drinking<sup>5</sup>  
the costly wine;  
let us teach the Huns  
to tend their wargear,  
which bold-hearted  
we shall bear to war.

---

words are tantamount to calling Hlöd an abusive name. But other passages connect the sitting on mounds with kingship; especially noteworthy is that in *Flateyjarbók* II 70, describing how a twelve-year-old prince named Björn, who was being brought up in his uncle's house, protested against his deprivation of the kingdom by sitting on his father's barrow; 'then for the first time he claimed the kingdom.'

<sup>4</sup> This is slightly at variance with what Gizur has said in the preceding verse. The meaning is apparently that the acceptance of a third only would lay Hlöd open to be called such names.

<sup>5</sup> *drekka ok dæma* is an alliterative formula of frequent occurrence, and *drekka dýrar veigar* is found more than once in the Poetic Edda.

(89) Well shall for you, Hlöd,  
the host be armed,  
fearless-hearted  
shall we fight this war,<sup>1</sup>  
with twelve-year-old warriors  
and two-winter foals,  
so shall we muster  
the might of Hunland.

All that winter Humli and Hlöd remained quiet; but in the spring they gathered together an army so vast that afterwards the land of the Huns was utterly despoiled of all its fighting-men. All men went, from twelve years old and upwards, who were able to bear weapons in war, and all their horses went, of two years old or more. So great was the multitude that the men of the phalanxes could be counted by their thousands only, and by nothing less than thousands; a captain was set over every thousand, and a standard over every phalanx. There were five thousands in every phalanx, each thousand containing thirteen hundreds, and in each hundred were four times forty men; these phalanxes were thirty-three in number.<sup>2</sup>

When this host had gathered together they rode through the forest called Mirkwood, which divided the land of the Huns from the land of the Goths; and when they came out of the forest they were in a land of broad populous tracts and level plains. On the plains stood a fair stronghold, over which Hervör, the sister of Hlöd and Angantýr, had command, together with Ormar her foster-father; they were set there to defend the land against the army of the Huns, and they had a strong garrison.

One morning at sunrise Hervör stood on a watchtower above the fortress-gate, and she saw a great cloud of dust from horses' hooves rising southwards towards the forest, which for a long time hid the sun. Presently she saw a glittering beneath the dustcloud, as though she were gazing on a mass of gold, bright shields overlaid with gold, gilded helms and bright corslets; and then she saw that it was the army of the Huns, and a mighty host.

---

<sup>2</sup> Verse 102 has 'six,' not 'thirty-three,' and that is certainly right, for it agrees with Saxo (Introduction p. xxvii); the latter figure must depend on a copyist's error at some stage.

Hervör went down swiftly and called her trumpeter, and ordered him to blow a summons to the host; and then she said, 'Take your weapons and make ready for battle; but do you, Ormar, ride to meet the Huns, and challenge them to battle before the south gate of the stronghold.'

Ormar answered:

(90) Surely shall I ride,  
my shield holding,  
to give battle  
for the Gothic people!<sup>1</sup>

Then Ormar rode out of the fortress towards the Huns; he called out in a great voice and told them to ride on to the fortress — 'and outside the stronghold-gate, in the plains to the south, there I offer you battle; and let them await the others, those who first come there.'

Now Ormar rode back to the fortress, and Hervör was ready, and all her army. They rode out of the stronghold with all the garrison to meet the Huns; and there a most mighty battle arose. But since the Huns had by far the larger army the slaughter became heavier in Hervör's host; and at last Hervör fell, and a great company around her. When Ormar saw her fall he fled away, and all the rest, who were fainthearted. Day and night Ormar rode, as fast as he could, to reach King Angantýr in Árheimar; but the Huns began now to ravage and burn far and wide across the land.

When Ormar came before Angantýr the king, he said<sup>2</sup>:

(91) From the south have I come  
to speak these tidings:  
fire in the marches  
of Mirkwood is raging,  
with the gore of men  
all Gothland's sprinkled!

And more he spoke:

(92) I know that Hervör  
Heidrek's daughter,

---

said he would *challenge the Huns* (i.e. 'to fight the Goths'), and lines to this effect have doubtless been lost after *bera*.

<sup>2</sup> On the very damaged verses that follow see Introduction, p. xxii

your own sister,  
has sunk to the earth;  
the Hun foemen  
felled the maiden  
and many more  
of your men by her —

- (93) in war<sup>1</sup> more happy  
than in wooer's converse,  
or at bridal banquet<sup>2</sup>  
on bench to seat her.

When King Angantýr heard this, he drew back his lips, and was slow to speak; at last he said, 'In no brotherly fashion have you been treated, my noble sister.'<sup>3</sup> Then he cast his eye over his following, and no great company was there with him; and he said:

- (94) Full many we were  
at the mead-drinking;  
when more are needed  
the number is smaller.

- (95) I see not the man  
among my lieges,  
not though I begged him  
and bribed him with rings,  
who would surely ride,  
his shield bearing,  
to seek out the host  
of the Hun people.

Then Gizur the old spoke:

- (96) No single ounce  
do I ask from you,

---

*b*-alliteration, but the MS forms suggest that a disyllabic form underlies them. The line is overfilled and altogether corrupt.

<sup>2</sup> The *brúðargangr* was the procession of the bride and ladies from the *brúðarhús* (bride's chamber) to the *stofa* (see Glossary) for the feast. The divergence between the manuscripts here is remarkable; the ingenious restoration of *U* in *Eddica Minora* is a virtual repetition of the preceding lines: *járna leikr* a kenning for 'battle,' and *ganga und líni* 'to be wedded.'

<sup>3</sup> Some editors give these words of Angantýr as verse.

no single coin<sup>1</sup>  
 of clinking gold<sup>2</sup>;  
 yet ride I shall,  
 my shield bearing,  
 and to the Hun army  
 offer the war-staff.<sup>3</sup>

Now it was the law of King Heidrek that if an army were invading a land and the king of that country marked out a field with hazel-poles<sup>4</sup> and ordained a place of battle, then the raiders should do no ravaging before the battle's issue was decided.

Gizur now clad himself for war with good weapons, and leapt upon his horse as if he were a youth. Then he said to the king:

(97) Where shall the Huns be  
 to war bidden?

The king answered:

(98) On the Danube-heath  
 below the Hills of Ash  
 shall you call them to fight,<sup>5</sup>  
 their foes meeting<sup>6</sup>;  
 there often Goths  
 have given battle,  
 renown gaining  
 in noble victories.

Now Gizur rode away until he came to the host of the Huns; but he rode no nearer than within earshot, and called out in a great voice:

to catch the ear of the toll-gatherer, who was sitting twelve rooms away, were reckoned up.

<sup>3</sup> *herstaf* must be accounted a very early, and rather surprising, emendation, for A.M. 202k descends from A.M. 203 and is not an independent witness to the text (Helgason p. xxxviii); *herstafr* is not otherwise known; it might mean 'battle-stave,' 'battle-rune' (cf. *Beowulf* 501, *beado-run*), but it is reminiscent of the phrase 'to send out the war-arrow (*her-ör*),' as a token that war threatened.

<sup>4</sup> It is likely that originally only a very small area was 'hazelled,' and that in later use *hasla völl* meant no more than 'determine a place of battle.'

<sup>5</sup> On this emendation, made also in verse 100, see Introduction p. xxiv.

<sup>6</sup> This emendation is based on the almost identical first half of verse 100, though the repetition of three lines out of four tells nothing for certain, of course, about the fourth.

(99) Daunted are your legions,  
doomed your leader,  
banners rise over you,  
Ódin is wrathful!

And then he said:

(100) On the Danube-heath  
below the Hills of Ash  
I call you to fight,  
your foes meeting; . . .<sup>1</sup>  
may Ódin let the dart fly  
as I prescribe it!<sup>2</sup>

When Hlöd heard the words of Gizur, he cried:

(101) Seize you Gizur  
Grýtingalidi,  
Angantýr's man  
come from Árheimar!

But Humli the king answered him, 'We must not harm heralds who ride alone.'<sup>3</sup>

Then Gizur said, 'Neither the Huns nor their hornbows<sup>4</sup> make us afraid!'<sup>5</sup> Then he struck spurs to his horse and rode back to King Angantýr, and went before him, and greeted him with fair words. The king asked whether he had met with the kings of the Huns, and Gizur answered, 'I spoke with them, and summoned them to the battlefield on the Danube Heath, in the dales of strife.'

Angantýr asked how great was the host of the Huns, and Gizur replied, 'Huge is their multitude':

<sup>1</sup> The words following *Yassarfjollum* in the manuscripts are quite incomprehensible, and the passage beyond repair. Neither *há* 'hide' nor *hár* 'rowlock' would give any sense. (Cf. Kock, *FF* § 23, *NN* § 2377.)

<sup>2</sup> Gizur here clearly hurls his javelin over the Huns, and so dedicates them to the god (see Appendix C). The verse is obviously corrupt.

<sup>3</sup> Humli's words, or some of them, are often given as verse.

<sup>4</sup> *hornbogi* is a rare word in Norse, in Scandinavia apparently known only as the name of a foreign weapon, and of somewhat uncertain meaning (but probably 'bow reinforced with horn'). (Falk, *Altnord. Waffen*. 91.)

<sup>5</sup> This odd sentence, with *Húnar gera* in the third person followed by *yðrir* ('your'), is no doubt the confused remnant of a verse.



(102) Of soldiers have they  
six phalanxes,  
every phalanx  
has five thousands,  
every thousand  
thirteen hundreds,  
and a full hundred  
is four times counted.<sup>1</sup>

Angantýr learnt now of the strength of the Hunnish host, and then he sent out messengers to every quarter, summoning to him every man who could bear arms and would give him service. He marched then to the Danube Heath with his army, and it was very great; and the Hunnish host came against him, and it was as great again.

On the next day they began the battle, and all that day they fought, and in the evening they went to their tents. They fought thus for eight days without the captains being wounded, but no-one could number the fallen. But both by day and night men thronged in to Angantýr from every quarter, and thus it was that he had no fewer men than at the beginning of the battle. And now the fighting grew yet more bitter than before; the Huns were ferocious, seeing their case, that only in victory lay hope of life, and that it would be of little avail to ask quarter of the Goths. But the Goths were defending their freedom and the land of their birth against the Huns, and for this they stood firm, and each man urged on his comrade. When the day was far spent the Goths pressed on so hard that the Hunnish legions gave way before them; and seeing this Angantýr strode out from behind the shield-wall and up into the foremost rank, and in his hand he held Tyrfing, and he cut down both men and horses; then the ranks fell apart before the kings of the Huns, and brother struck at brother. There Hlöd fell and Humli the king, and the Huns took to flight; but the Goths slew them, and made such carnage that the rivers were choked and turned from their courses, and the valleys were filled with dead men and horses.

---

<sup>1</sup> *halir fjórtalðir*, lit. 'men four times counted,' i.e. 'quadrupled,' which is obscure. The prose before verse 89 has *fernir fjórir tígir*, 'four times forty.' In neither passage do the words *þúsund* and *hundrað* (usually = 120) appear to be used as numbers at all.

Angantýr went to search among the slain, and finding his brother Hlöd he said:

(103) Treasures<sup>1</sup> uncounted,  
kinsman, I offered you,  
wealth and cattle  
well to content you;  
but for war's reward  
you have won neither  
realm more spacious  
nor rings glittering.

And then he said:

(104) We are cursed, kinsman,  
your killer am I!  
It will be never forgotten;  
the Norns'<sup>2</sup> doom is evil.

---

*valkyrjur*). Usually there are three Norns, sometimes many; some are good, but some evil. In *Völuspá* 20 the Norns are named *Urðr*, *Verðandi* and *Skuld* (Past, Present, and Future), but probably only *Urðr* is an ancient name; this is cognate with O.E. *wyrd* (whence come the weird sisters in Macbeth, and Mod. English 'weird'), and is perhaps derived from an Indo-European root meaning 'to weave'—the conception of the weaving of destiny is found in Norse and elsewhere in Germanic. See especially *Fáfnismál* 12–13, *SnE.* 23–4, and *Þáttur af Nornagesti* (ed. Bugge, *NS* 77; *Flateyjarbók* I 358).

II<sup>1</sup>

Angantýr was long king in Reidgotaland; he was mighty, and a great warrior, and lines of kings are sprung from him. His son was Heidrek Wolfskin,<sup>2</sup> who afterwards was long king in Reidgotaland; he had a daughter who was named Hild, and she was the mother of Hálfðan the Valiant, the father of Ívar the Wide-grasping.<sup>3</sup> Ívar came to Sweden with his army, as is told in the sagas of the kings<sup>4</sup>; but King Ingjald the Wicked<sup>5</sup> feared his host and burned himself and all his retinue with him in his own house, at the place called Ræning.<sup>6</sup> Then Ívar the Wide-grasping made all Sweden subject to himself; he conquered also Denmark and Kúrland,<sup>7</sup> the land of the Saxons and the land of the Esths, and all the eastern realms as far as the confines of Gardaríki; he ruled also the land of the Saxons to the west, and conquered that part of England which is called Northumbria. Ívar the Wide-grasping subjected to himself all the realm of the Danes, and set over it King Valdar, giving to him Álfhild his daughter for his wife. Their sons were Harald War-tooth and Randvér, who was afterwards slain in England.<sup>8</sup> But Valdar died in Denmark, and Randvér succeeded to the Danish realm and became king over it; Harald War-tooth took to himself the name of king in Gautland,<sup>9</sup> and afterwards laid beneath

---

vast realm (a very similar account of his conquests is given in *Ynglinga Saga* ch. 41). His father is said to have been the great-grandson of Hrothgar, king of the Danes in *Beowulf*, and he himself may have reigned in the later seventh century.

<sup>4</sup> i.e. *Heimskringla*

<sup>5</sup> Ingjald, most famous of the Yngling kings of Sweden, was the great-grandson of Adils, the Eadgils of *Beowulf*. The story of how he increased his power by inviting all the petty kings to his inheritance feast at Uppsala and burning the hall down over their heads is told in *Ynglinga Saga* chs. 34 ff., and the story of his own burning in ch. 40.

<sup>6</sup> This name is found also in the verse of the *Ynglingatal* cited by Snorri (op. cit. ch. 40); it was probably a place on Tosterö in Lake Mälaren. The original form of the name is discussed by A. Noreen, *Ynglingatal*, 1925, 243.

<sup>7</sup> Modern Latvia, west of the Gulf of Riga

<sup>8</sup> The sources do not agree in the section of the genealogy between Ívar and Harald War-tooth (cf. *Flateyjarbók* I 26), and the personages involved, Valdar and Randvér, are very obscure. Harald War-tooth is an important figure in Saxo's history (ed. Holder 246 ff., trans. Elton 296 ff.).

<sup>9</sup> i.e. modern Götland, the land of the Geatas in *Beowulf*

him all the realms aforesaid, over which King Ívar the Wide-grasping had been lord.<sup>1</sup>

King Randvér took as his wife Ása, daughter of King Harald the Red-bearded, from Norway in the north,<sup>2</sup> and their son was Sigurd Ring.<sup>3</sup> The death of King Randvér was sudden, and Sigurd Ring succeeded to the kingdom of the Danes. He fought with King Harald War-tooth at Brávöll in eastern Gautland, and there fell King Harald and a mighty array.<sup>4</sup> This battle, and that which Angantýr and Hlöd his brother fought on the Danube Heath, are the most renowned in the ancient tales, with the greatest count of slain. King Sigurd Ring ruled over Denmark till the day of his death, and his son King Ragnar Hairy-breeches<sup>5</sup> after him.

The son of King Harald War-tooth was named Eystein the Wicked; he succeeded to the Swedish realm after his father, and ruled over it until the sons of King Ragnar<sup>6</sup> slew him, as is told in his saga.<sup>7</sup> The sons of King Ragnar subjected to themselves the realm of the Swedes, but after the death of King Ragnar his son Björn Ironside<sup>8</sup> took the Swedish throne, Sigurd the Danish, Hvítserk the Eastern kingdom, and Ívar the Boneless England.<sup>9</sup> The sons of Björn Ironside were Eirík and Refil; Refil was a war-lord and a sea-king, but King Eirík ruled Sweden after his father, and he lived only a little while. Then Eirík the son of Refil inherited the kingdom; he was a great warrior

up the Seine to Paris in 845, while some at least of the numerous legendary progeny of Lodbrók were historical persons, leaders in the viking campaigns in the West after the middle of the ninth century. The tradition that intrudes Lodbrók into the line of the kings of Sweden is quite unhistorical. See A. Mawer, in *Saga-book of the Viking Society* VI (1908) 68 ff.; Herrmann, 613 ff.

<sup>6</sup> The sons of Ragnar were many, by different wives, and show many variations in the sources (of which the chief are Saxo, ed. Holder 300 ff., and *Ragnars Saga*, ed. M. Olsen, *S.T.U.A.G.N.L.* XXXVI). The four who appear here are said in *Ragnars Saga* to be the sons of Áslaug, who was herself the daughter of Sigurd Fáfnir's Bane and Brynhild, and thus the Lodbrók legend is linked to the story of the Nibelungs.

<sup>7</sup> *Ragnars Saga*, chs. 9-12

<sup>8</sup> Björn Ironside was one of the leaders of the celebrated viking voyage to the Mediterranean in 859-62.

<sup>9</sup> According to *Ragnars Saga* ch. 7, because Ragnar Lodbrók broke the three nights' abstinence after their wedding that his wife demanded, their eldest son Ívar was born with gristle instead of bones, and could not walk; but he made up for this in cunning. He was the most famous of the original leaders of the Danish attack on England in the reign of Æthelred I, but before the movement into Wessex in 870 he had disappeared from history.

and a very mighty king. The sons of Eirík son of Björn were Önund of Uppsala and King Björn, and in those days Sweden came again to be divided between brothers; they had the kingdom after Eirík the son of Refil.

King Björn built the place called Barrow, and he was called Björn of the Barrow<sup>1</sup>; Bragi the skald dwelt with him.<sup>2</sup> The son of King Önund was named Eirík, who succeeded his father on the throne at Uppsala; he was a mighty king. In his days Harald the Fair-haired raised himself to the throne in Norway, first of his kindred to bring Norway under the rule of one king.<sup>3</sup> The son of King Eirík at Uppsala was named Björn, who possessed the kingdom after his father, and ruled it long.<sup>4</sup> The sons of Björn were Eirík the Victorious and Ólaf, who succeeded to the realm and kingly power after their father. Ólaf was the father of Styrbjörn the Strong. In their days King Harald the Fair-haired died.<sup>5</sup>

Styrbjörn fought with King Eirík his father's brother at Fýrisvellir, and there Styrbjörn fell.<sup>6</sup> Eirík ruled the realm of Sweden thereafter till the day of his death, and his wife was Sigríd the Ambitious<sup>7</sup>; their son was named Ólaf, and he was adopted as king in Sweden after King Eirík. He was then a child, and the Swedes carried him about with them, and therefore they called him Cloak-king, but afterwards Ólaf the Swede. He was king for a long time and very mighty. First of the kings of Sweden he received the Christian faith, and Sweden was in name Christian in his days.<sup>8</sup>

---

Önund, by Snorri, who says also that this Eirík died when Harald had been ten years king of all Norway (op. cit., chs. 13, 28).

<sup>4</sup> Snorri says that this Björn was king of Sweden for fifty years (*Haralds Saga Hárfagra* ch. 29).

<sup>5</sup> It is now thought that Harald died about 940-5.

<sup>6</sup> It was during the battle of Fýrisvellir that Ódin appeared to Eirík, as described in Appendix C. Fýrisvellir is near Uppsala; the battle probably took place about 985, and the death of Eirík about 995. The story of Styrbjörn and the battle of Fýrisvellir is told in *Styrbjarnar þáttur*, *Flateyjarbók* II 70 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Eirík's widow got this name after burning two suitor kings (including Harald Grenski of Westfold, father of St Ólaf) in her hall, saying that 'she would make these little kings tired of courting her' (*Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 43).

<sup>8</sup> King Ólaf came to the throne of Sweden at the same time as Ólaf Tryggvason (995-1000) embarked on the conversion of Norway; and he was baptised in Västergötland by an English bishop about 1008. His extreme unpopularity with the Swedes forced him ultimately to retire to Västergötland, where he built a church at Skara; he died in 1021 or 1022.

The son of King Ólaf the Swede was named Önund<sup>1</sup>; he inherited the kingdom after him and died of a sickness. In his time King Ólaf the Saint fell at Stiklastadir.<sup>2</sup> Eymund<sup>3</sup> was the name of the second son of Ólaf the Swede, who inherited the realm from his brother; and in his days the Swedes neglected the Christian faith. Eymund was king for only a little time.

There was a mighty man in Sweden, and of high lineage; his name was Steinkel, and his mother was Ástríd, daughter of Njál the son of Finn the Squinter from Hálogaland; his father was Rögnvald the Old. At first Steinkel was a jarl in Sweden, but after the death of Eymund the Swedes took him for their king; and the Swedish throne passed from the ancestral line of the ancient kings. Steinkel was a mighty prince; his wife was the daughter of King Eymund; and he died of a sickness in Sweden about the time that King Harald fell in England.<sup>4</sup> The son of Steinkel was called Ingi, whom the Swedes took for king next after Hákon.<sup>5</sup> Ingi was king for a long time, well-liked and a good Christian<sup>6</sup>; he put down sacrificing in Sweden and ordered all the people of the land to become Christian; but the Swedes had too strong a belief in the heathen gods and held to their ancient ways. King Ingi's wife was a woman called Mær; her brother's name was Svein. No man was more dear to King Ingi than he, and Svein became thereby the mightiest man in Sweden. But the Swedes thought that King Ingi had infringed their rights under the ancient law of the land, when he found fault with many things that Steinkel his father had let be; and at a certain assembly which the Swedes held with King Ingi they gave him the choice of two things, either to observe the ancient laws or else to give up his throne. Then King Ingi spoke, and

---

cessor of Önund-Jacob is called Emund or Eymund in several sources. With his death about 1060 the ancient line of the Yngling kings came to an end.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the death of Harald Hardrádi, king of Norway, at Stamford Bridge in 1066. The statement that Steinkel died about the same time is found also in *Magnús Saga Berfætts* ch. 12 (*Heimskringla* III).

<sup>5</sup> The writer of 203 has no doubt put *Steinkel* instead of *Hákon* here because the latter is not otherwise mentioned in the text; but the succession Steinkel-Hákon-Ingi is found in *Magnús Saga Berfætts* ch. 12 and elsewhere. Ingi of Sweden was a contemporary of Magnús Barefoot of Norway, and an account of their relations is given loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> The following account of the religious opposition of the Swedes to King Ingi, the raising up of Svein the Sacrificer, and the burning of his house, agrees with what is told in more condensed fashion in *Flateyjarbók* II 424 f. (cf. also *Magnússona Saga* ch. 24, *Heimskringla* III).

said that he would not leave the true faith; whereat the Swedes cried out, and pelted him with stones, and drove him from the law-assembly.<sup>1</sup>

Svein, the king's kinsman, remained behind at that assembly, and he offered to make sacrifice for the Swedes if they would grant him the kingdom; all agreed to Svein's offer, and he was accepted as king over all the Swedish realm. Then a horse<sup>2</sup> was led forth to the assembly, hewn in pieces, and divided up for eating, and the sacrificial tree<sup>3</sup> was reddened with its blood. Thereafter all the Swedes cast off the Christian faith, and sacrifices were instituted, and they drove King Ingi away; he departed into western Gautland. For three years Svein the Sacrificer was king over the Swedes.

King Ingi went with his own bodyguard and some followers, though it was only a small force; he rode east across Smáland<sup>4</sup> and into eastern Gautland, and so into Sweden; he rode by day and night and came upon Svein unawares in the early morning. They seized the house over their heads and set it on fire, and burnt all the company who were inside. There was a landed man called Thjóf who was burnt there; he had been in the following of Svein the Sacrificer. Svein came out and was cut down. And so Ingi took the kingship of the Swedes anew, and restored the Christian faith; he ruled the realm till the day of his death, and died of a sickness.<sup>5</sup>

King Steinkel had a son called Hallstein, and he was king together with King Ingi his brother. The sons of Hallstein were Philip and Ingi,<sup>6</sup> who inherited the throne of Sweden after King Ingi the Old. Philip married Ingigerd, the daughter of King Harald the son of Sigurd<sup>7</sup>; and he was only a short time king.

what is said of the 'world-tree,' Yggdrasill, in the Eddaic poems *Völuspa* (19) and *Fjölsvinnsmál* (19-20). See also p. 47 above, note 2.

<sup>4</sup> The extreme south-east of Sweden, south of Östergötland. Ingi rode through Östergötland and so into *Svíþjóð*, the ancient kingdom of Sweden, as opposed to Götland.

<sup>5</sup> King Ingi died about 1110.

<sup>6</sup> Ingi Hallsteinsson died in 1125; he appears in *Haraldssona Saga* ch. 22 (*Heimskringla* III) as the husband of Brigida, daughter of Harald Gilli, the Irishman who claimed to be a son of Magnús Barefoot and made his way to the throne of Norway in the thirties of the twelfth century.

<sup>7</sup> Harald Hardrádi, son of Sigurd Sýr ('Sow')